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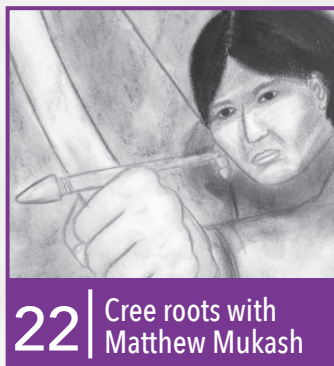
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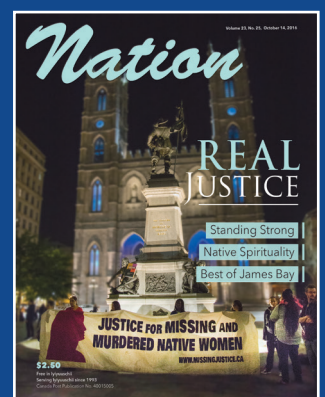
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Cover photo by Trish Chiasson

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www.nationnews.ca October 14, 2016 *the Nation* 5



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Teaching throat singing to the Quebec public in Montreal's Old Port



A full-throated welcome

by Jesse Staniforth

Credit: Guy Labussionière

Nina Segalowitz, an Inuk from the Northwest Territories who has lived in Montreal since she was a newborn adopted during the Sixties Scoop, couldn't learn throat-singing from an Elder, so she and her friend Taqralik Partridge learned from a cassette tape.

"We hunted down a woman who knew how – she gave us a tape and said, 'Come back when you know some of the songs,'" Segalowitz told the Nation at the end of a throat-singing workshop she held at Montreal's Ashukan Cultural Space. "We'd be next to the cassette player, pressing play-rewind, play-rewind, trying to get those sounds going. Then she helped us fine-tune our technique."

That wasn't how it was supposed to work. Throat singing was traditionally handed down from older women to girls, but Anglican missionaries sexualized the practice and prohibited it as devil worship.

"Teaching this today is part of my healing circle, after having been stolen from my parents," Segalowitz explained. "I had no contact with my community until I was 18 – I had never met another Native person or another Inuit. At the age of 18, I was lucky to find a Friendship Centre, and it just went from there."

The event was part of the Ashukan Cultral Centre's offerings at Quebec's Journées de la culture, when institutions across Quebec open their doors to the public. Also on the schedule for Ashukan was a showing of Manitoba artist Riel Benn's Classic Rock paintings, which frame lyrics and images from classic rock records in the context of colonialism and Native resistance.

"If any of us have Native blood in our veins, that means our ancestors fought hard to survive, and it's our responsibility to speak of their stories," said Ashukan executive director Nadine St-Louis. "Our job is to decolonize. We're using the initiative as an opportunity to remove the colonial lens and put on a cultural lens. This morning we sat in a circle and I explained what this space was, and the diversity of Indigenous peoples who live on the Quebec territory, and that we were on traditional Mohawk territory – all the jaws dropped. This was really Indigenous Culture 101."

Too often, says St-Louis, the non-Indigenous public may feel nervous about entering spaces like hers to encounter Indigenous art and culture.

"We put the word out for people to come and discover the diversity of Indigenous cultures," St-Louis said. "When people see these invitations

on social media platforms, they're not afraid to step into that space that sometimes is a little uncomfortable because there's a lot of dialogue, and a lot of catching up to do."

Segalowitz – who gave afternoon throat-singing workshops on October 1-2 – laughed with participants as they tried a traditional practice that is also a game, in which the first person to laugh was the loser. The whole room was in high spirits, since no one found the techniques Segalowitz was teaching very easy, and most people were quickly caught short by coughing and giggling.

Segalowitz was happy to see audiences embracing the throat singing that she waited so long to learn, and thrilled to see Indigenous youth participate.

"People feel more comfortable doing it now – especially the younger generation," she said. "They're looking for identity, and a connection to who they are. With the media, Facebook and YouTube, we're on it – it's more accessible and our young people are more willing to celebrate that. We're lucky to have Elders who still know the old ways and the old songs."



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Chisasibi teenager dead after domestic incident

According to an online report published by the Montreal Gazette, a 19-year-old Chisasibi resident died following a police intervention October 2 outside of a home in the community.

The report says the youth died after the Eeyou Eenou Police Force (EPPF) in Chisasibi responded to a 911 emergency call at 9:45 pm claiming that an individual was outside the caller's residence with a gun. According to the report, police attempted to

negotiate with the man. The Bureau des enquêtes indépendantes passed the investigation over to the Sûreté du Québec (SQ).

While neither an official statement nor the name of the person involved has been released, Chisasibi residents in contact with the Nation have given unconfirmed reports that the death is believed to be a suicide.

The EPPF was unable to be reached for comment at press time.



MMIW activists call out Trudeau government

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau joined those gathered in Ottawa for an annual vigil for missing and murdered indigenous women and two-spirited people and reiterated his commitment to achieving justice for Canada's First Nations, specifically First Nations women.

Some who spoke at the event took the opportunity to express their frustration with what they perceive to be lip service for the serious issues facing Native women.

"I'm tired of government. I'm tired of their words," said Beverley Jacobs, a Mohawk and former head

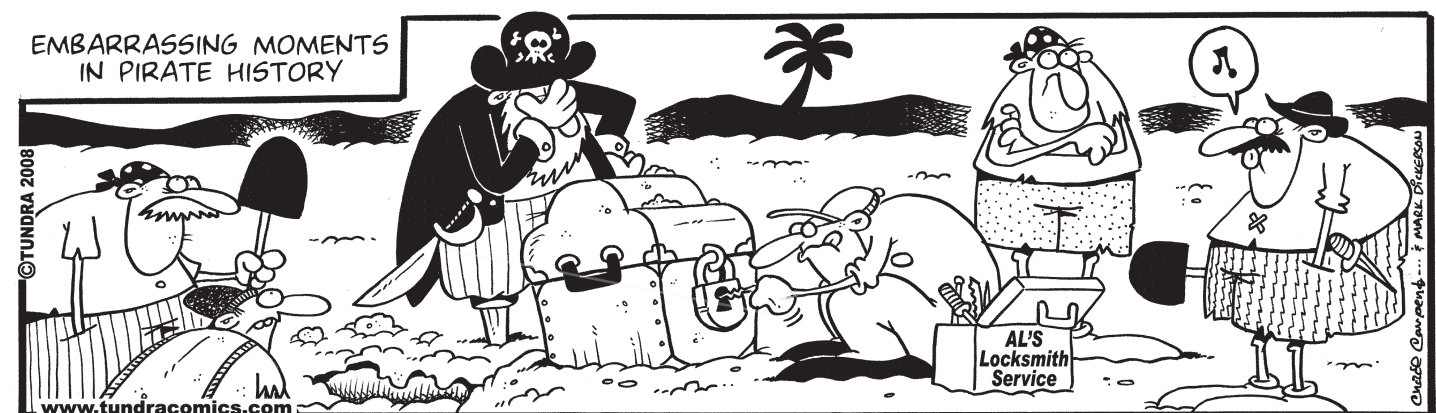
of the Native Women's Association of Canada. "I want to see something done for families. Something that they can feel their own justice is being addressed."

"We shouldn't have to beg for justice," added Algonquin Bridget Tolley, who lost her mother over 15 years ago when she was struck and killed by a Quebec provincial police cruiser in Kitigan Zibi.

"This is not something we'll be able to change overnight, or in a week, or in a month, or in a year," responded Trudeau, speaking to the rally. "But I hope in the coming years

that we will be able to...[hold these vigils] as a remembrance of things past and not as a reflection of an ongoing national tragedy that continues."

Also attending the event were Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett, Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould and Status of Women Minister Patty Hajdu – the three ministers overseeing the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls launched last August.



Activists demand action on
**missing and murdered Indigenous
women** as national inquiry begins

by Jesse Staniforth
Photos by Trish Chiasson



REAL JUSTICE

Female Indigenous leaders took turns sharing their stories and speaking to the needs of Aboriginal women in Canada that still need to be addressed.



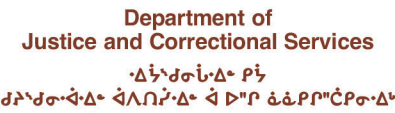
“Two years,” observed Idle No More organizer Melissa Mollen-Dupuis, speaking about the mandate of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. “That’s two years of women dying, women disappearing, young girls being put into pimps’ hands waiting at the airports. Because they feel Indigenous women are free game; because nobody’s going to believe or understand or even look for them. That’s how one of the most prolific serial killers in history could be active in Canada for so long – because First Nations women didn’t count in the eyes of police who were investigating.”

It was a sobering assessment, made as Mollen-Dupuis joined other activists, family members and their supporters at the annual vigil for missing and murdered Indigenous women October 4 in Montreal.

“Over that two years, is the money going to go to programs,” she added, “or is it going to go to organizing this big commission? Is it going to be a selfie opportunity, or is it going to bring real justice for Indigenous women? There’s a lack of shelters in different communities. Or in some cases it’s been police who’ve been at the base of these women’s victimization. What’s going to happen to them?”

Last year, with only weeks to go before the federal election, she was imagining the possibility of a future without former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper during her speech to the crowd. This year, she focused on Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government and its commitment to Indigenous issues.

“There has been a nod, a recognition of the need for change,” Mollen-Dupuis said. But she questioned whether the Trudeau government would actually implement the change that’s needed. “We feel the honeymoon is starting to be



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over with the new government. We did get the inquiry we wanted, but does it have the backbone it needs to change situations for Native women? I find it very decorative for the moment, not very structured. It kind of scares me."



The lack of communication from the commission of inquiry was a complaint that several people repeated throughout the evening's events – at the moment, there is little idea what the commissioners are doing, or what the inquiry will look like.

Meanwhile, the Cree Health Board's Victoria Wabano shared the news about police reopening an investigation into a missing woman's case. Wabano also reported progress on creating inland and coastal women's shelters in Eeyou Istchee.

Activist and vigil organizer Ellen Gabriel, a member of Kanesatake's Turtle Clan, noted that the history of attacks on Indigenous women is as old as European colonization, which targeted women to destroy First Nations community structure. She demand-

ed that politicians be required to learn Canada's colonial history.

Speaking to the Nation, Gabriel said she is reserving judgment on the Liberal government, which rose to power on huge promises to Indigenous people. "I

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think the government's doing a bit of back-peddalling on some of its election promises," she said. "There's no movement on the implementation of the Declaration [on the Rights of Indigenous People]."

Gabriel said that the national inquiry started on a sour note by appointing a non-Inuk to represent Inuit women, which has resulted in an outcry from Inuit organizations. As well, she was uneasy about the idea of holding a pre-inquiry.


"To ask the families to once again be a witness, and once again tell the stories, is retraumatizing them in a system that has not been friendly to the lives of their loved ones, that has proven time and time again that the system is not working for us," she said.

Gabriel still hopes the inquiry will ultimately produce strong recommendations that will satisfy families, and which will be unsparing in their examination of the justice system, the police and the effects of colonialism in Canada.


"And they'd better implement those recommendations," Gabriel said. "Because if they don't, this younger generation will not stand for it. There will be rioting in the streets – because you can only tolerate so much. We as a people have never resorted to violence, ever. We have always been in defense of our lives. But if Canada really wants to be this world leader, they have to start putting action behind the words that they promised."




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A helmet is not something that a child should grow into. While it may add to equipment costs in the long term, a child should **never wear a helmet that is either too big or too small.**

Credit: Ride UK BMX



allowed on an approved course without an approved helmet. This is particularly important on paved surfaces, where the risk of injury may be higher than on dirt courses.

Nicole Ritzer agrees. A Planning, Project, and Research Officer with the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay, she is strong proponent of a safety-first approach to BMX cycling, and feels that it is important for parents to get

involved before their children hit the track.

"It is so important for riders to take the necessary precautions to avoid injury before hitting the track," Ritzer said. "That means, at a bare minimum, they should be using protective equipment, including a helmet, knee pads and shin guards."

As so many hockey parents already know, outfitting a youngster with sports equipment can be a costly venture. While

everyday cycling helmets can be purchased for as little as \$40, riders tackling a paved BMX track will want to consider using a full-face helmet that not only protects the skull, but could also make the difference in saving a rider's teeth in the event of serious fall.

According to Bell Helmet, a helmet is not something that a child should grow into. While it may add to equipment costs in the long term, a

child should never wear a helmet that is either too big or too small.

Protective clothing is also imperative, particularly on a paved track, where a fall could result in the rider suffering a serious road rash. "Full armour is available and widely used by downhill racers, and is something to consider for more older, more experienced BMX riders," Ritzer noted.

Now that your child is properly outfitted with

a full-face helmet, and proper attire and armour, it is time to inspect their bike.

BMX is one of the fastest growing segments in the bicycle industry, with a growing number of BMX bicycle models, and aftermarket accessories, now available. But again, whether you are simply taking a leisurely ride on a touring bicycle, or have invested heavily in a high-end BMX racer, it is critical to do regu-

lar mechanical checks on your ride.

"Ensuring that your bike is in good working order is half the battle when it comes to riding safety," said Ritzer. "Just like car owners do mechanical checks on their vehicles before driving them, cyclists should do the same."

A mechanical check before riding is simple and easy. First and foremost, riders should check the brakes on their bicycle

prior to hitting the road and track, ensuring that cables are not obstructed, and both the front and rear brakes are fully operational.

"Well-maintained brakes can make the difference between a routine stop or a serious accident that can cause injury to people, both on and off the track," Ritzer explained.

Proper tire maintenance is also critical. Be sure that tires are

inflated to specification. Overinflated tires increase the risk of a blowout, while underinflated tires can have an impact on the rider's control of their bike, and ability to brake and avoid obstacles.

Kids will be kids, and it is impossible to prevent all injuries with active children. But a few simple safety steps and the right equipment can make all the difference between a fun day at the track and an evening spent at the clinic.



The Legend of Waawitwaanuu,
All illustrations by Brian Webb

Reconnecting with the spirit

Matthew Mukash shares his perspective on Indigenous spirituality

by Dan Isaac

As a boy, I'd always wanted to learn the traditional spiritual teachings of my Mi'kmaq ancestors. No one in my family was a particularly traditional or spiritual but I found a book in my aunt's library called Mi'kmaq Hieroglyphics.

I was excited to discover the stories, traditions and spiritual practices of my people, but when I started to read I was disappointed. The book only referenced Mi'kmaq stories and motifs through their correlation with Christianity.

When I asked my mom why, she told me that the Mi'kmaq had been converted to Christianity through the process of colonization. And strangely, though I'd never known the ceremonies, the stories or the traditions, it felt like something had been taken from me.

The story of lost Indigenous culture isn't new or unique. It's a process that's happened across the continent since the dawn of European contact. For a significant portion of the 20th century, practicing Indigenous ceremonies in Canada was even illegal.

But the reclamation of culture, ceremony and spiritual practices is the story that must now take centre stage, says Cree Elder Matthew Mukash, a former Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees.

"We have to go back to the period before the 'living tissue' of our cultures were broken by external forces," said Mukash. "Our ancestors understood the world around them and beyond. Their knowledge was so complex and not only covered all aspects of being human – physical, emotional, mental

and spiritual – but the interconnect-
edness of all creation."

Mukash, in addition to a successful professional and academic career, is a keeper of Indigenous knowledge. He practices a number of Indigenous ceremonies, including the sweat lodge, shaking tent and the sun dance.

The division of spirituality into either Christian or traditional needs to stop, Mukash believes, because this mentality can divide families and communities. He feels the best way to accomplish this is to recognize the allegorical nature of all spiritual belief.

"I'm among those who read the Bible as a metaphor that takes you deeper into the meaning of life, its challenges. Our own Eeyou legends are not interpreted in a literal, or historical, sense. Take the legend of Chickapash," said Mukash.

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"Chickapash climbed a tree that brought him to a new land in the skies. He later brought his family there. On the way up, one of his family members would fall from time to time and he would catch them and put them back on the tree. In a metaphoric sense, the tree is the Tree of Knowledge or Tree of Life on which we are to climb in this lifetime. It's our life's journey along which we are to gain knowledge and wisdom. When we fall by the wayside on this journey, the Elders, who have the knowledge and wisdom, will put us back on track every time," Mukash recounted, noting that this explanation had merely scratched the surface of the true meaning regarding the story.

Mukash has observed a resurgence of curiosity in Eeyou youth about their traditional identity. "Our young people today are asking me questions like: Who are we? Where did we come from? How did we get here? Why are we in a situation where we're in today? Just to name a few," said Mukash. "Mastering the ways of your ancestors helps in personal development by taking an integrated approach to understanding life, its meaning and purpose."

I remember feeling the same confusion after my unsuccessful attempt to discover the ancient ways of my people. The next time I found myself in Listuguj, the community where my mom was raised, I asked some Elders if the ancestral Mi'kmaq spiritual ceremonies were still

practiced. The answer I got was "maybe," but I'd have to go deep into the woods and find a medicine person who would teach me.

"All human beings have the gift and ability to adapt," said Mukash. "We were once a nomadic people, belonging to a hunting and gathering culture. Today we find that we have the capacity to be scientists, doctors or lawyers. Going back to the ways of our ancestors does not mean going back to using bows and arrows, and wearing animal-skin garments. It means using our ancestral knowledge and wisdom to become a balanced human being, so we can help ourselves, families, communities, nations and beyond more effectively."

I went pretty deep into those woods but never found a medicine person. In hindsight, maybe they were teasing me. Or maybe that was the point: the forest was meant to be medicine and teacher in and of itself.

"The spirituality of our ancestors is 'Indigenous knowledge' that developed from the beginning of time to the present," said Mukash. "It's one that sees the Earth and all creation as living beings, that everything is interconnected through one spirit. Every individual creation is sacred — be it tree, rock, water, air or animal, and has its own intelligence and story to tell or teaching to share. Going back to the roots is where many answers will be found to address today's challenges."



Taapwaauchaayimiisu Believe In Yourself

OUR PROGRAM

Taapwaauyimiisu (Believe in yourself) program is a resource available for the schools in the three Cree communities, where the pilot project is currently being launched. We offer support to the students' ages 12 to 17 years old who, for various reasons, are temporarily suspended from 3 to 5 days from school.

The expression **"Believe in yourself"** is dear to our program as we want to send a strong message of empowerment and self-worth to our youth.

OUR SERVICE SITES

Taapwaauchaayimiisu program in Mississauga has officially moved in their new service site at the Family Resource Centre (Old Youth Centre). Thank you, Cree Nation of Mississauga, for your collaboration in providing space for our youth.

We would also like to thank everyone that attended our open houses in Waskaganish and Chisasibi.

Should you require more information, please contact the coordinator.

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Literacy camps

by Dan Isaac



Reversing the learning loss of summer

Summer is the time kids have fun and relax, but unfortunately for some, time away from school can result in a loss of learning. On average, a child can lose up to a Grade level of reading comprehension over the summer months if they're not reading regularly.

"The vision behind our camps is that we want to mitigate the summer learning loss," said Mélanie Valcin, regional manager for Frontier College in Quebec and Nunavut. "We're trying to mobilize communities around the value of literacy."

Frontier College, in partnership with the Cree School Board, recently wrapped up their fourth cohort of summer literacy camps in the Eeyou Istchee. This year's edition served all nine Cree communities with a total of 646 Cree children attending – an increase of 22% over 2015.

Statistics show that boys' reading skills often lag behind their female counterparts. Their learning loss over the summer months is also often more pronounced. According to a 2002 study by Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, boys read slower, less often, and struggle more than girls with reading comprehension.

Nonetheless, this year's gender breakdown for the literacy camps was close to 50-50 with a few more girl campers than boys, according to Valcin.

Strong cultural grounding is a big part of the literacy effort. Many of the 2178 free

books given to the children focused on Indigenous culture, while 366 adults from the Cree communities visited the kids at camp.

"We had a lot of Elders and other community members come and facilitate cultural and traditional activities," said Valcin. "We make it a point to involve a lot of Cree culture into the camps."

In addition, 16 of the 44 camp counselors hailed from communities in Eeyou Istchee. Charity Lacroix, from Oujé-Bougamou was one of them. "It was a lot of fun, I learned a lot, and it was great to work with kids from my community," she said. "The kids really enjoyed it, and they said that it helped them be more prepared for school."

But it's not only about reading. The camps are meant to be fun and keep the kids active. Every day each child was encouraged to read for about an hour, followed by 90 minutes of outdoor activities that ranged from sports to music and theatre.

"We wanted it to be a fun camp with reading and writing, but we didn't want the kids to feel like they were in summer school," said Lacroix.

There's also a creative aspect. The kids are not only reading; they're also introduced to new forms of expression. "Through the four weeks the kids are at camp, the counselors work with them to create a larger creative project that they can then present to the community," said Valcin. "A lot of the children will write a play and perform it or produce a music video, so there's a lot of creativity."

The kids who attended enjoyed their experience and 99% of parents said they'd send their children back. "There's a myth that kids, especially boys, don't like to read, but we've found that when you give them books, they just devour them," said Valcin.

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Tanya Tagaq performs with Buen Clima at the
Red Bull Academy; Photos by Dan Wilton

A Powerful VOICE

by Dan Isaac



show, audience members were noticeably moved. Some were brought to tears. And all of this was achieved without uttering a word of English. “I didn’t know what she was saying, but I felt it,” said Zissis.

The performance seemed improvised, as if the singer and musicians were allowing the music to take them where it wanted. Discovery on stage and in life is something Tagaq has touched on in different interviews.

“People are constantly trying to categorize and organize thought and genre, when really there’s so many bridges to be walked upon that have no meaning,” said Tagaq. “If you want to discover new things you can’t over-categorize.”

The concert ended as innocently and quickly as it started. The music faded, a flushed Tagaq thanked the crowd in the same high-pitched voice and left the stage. It felt like the audience was left in a state of shock. As I exited the venue energized and awestruck, the only thought I could form in my head was – wow!

Ashoeless Tanya Tagaq appeared from backstage and the crowd paused in anticipation as she approached the microphone. She greeted audience members in a high-pitched, soft voice, then turned and asked the band, “Are you ready?” The second the rhythm hit, the soft voice transformed into guttural shrieks that raised the hairs on your neck.

Tagaq was in Montreal September 28, perform-

ing for a Red Bull Music Academy Event at La Tulipe in collaboration with the Toronto punk band Fucked Up.

“I was so pleasantly surprised with how sensitive and vulnerable and open it was,” said Tagaq in an interview on Q, CBC Radio’s arts magazine show. “It was wonderful to be able to collaborate with these guys.”

Collaboration is a habit for Tagaq. She was recently featured heavily on A Tribe Called Red’s new album We Are The Halluci Nation, and in the past has performed with Iceland’s Björk and Canadian rapper Shad.

Strangely though, she’s one of the only Inuit throat singers to perform solo.

Inuit throat singing developed as a game in which two people, usually women, would sing into each other’s mouth until one would stop from exhaustion. Tagaq performs the feat solo, I assume, because she never has to stop.

From the moment she sang her first note, you quickly realized that listening to the 2014 Polaris Music Prize winner’s albums and seeing her perform live are two completely different experiences. Tagaq

transforms herself and the stage. At points she’s an animal, then a crying child, sometimes it feels her voice comes directly from a spirit.

It’s not easy listening music – it’s powerful storytelling that is sometimes uncomfortable. The crowd thinned slightly during her performance. Some concert-goers were visibly shaken by Tagaq’s power and left early. “It’s as if she’s multiple people when she’s performing. Like she’s channels something,” said fan Vera Szissis.

Tagaq touches on motifs of abuse, colonialism and sexuality. Throughout her

Tanya Tagaq wows crowd at the Red Bull Music Academy

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Dry dock
by Sonny Orr



The sturdy Norwest 24-foot cedar-and-canvas canoe reached the crest of a 15-foot wave. We bobbed over the top only to see a mass of swells. The 40-horse outboard quickly revved up and we flew across the swells for some time before falling back in the rolling and dangerous waters. The pilot kept an eye out for rocks while we plodded along to the nearby Loon Islands. The salty water sprayed about us while we bailed out with the pail, which doubled as a cistern.

On our usual hunting trips, we wouldn't touch shore for most of the day, except for tea and a chance to stretch and dry out, if it wasn't raining. Come to think of it, we never caught the sniffles like the freshwater guys — makes me wonder. The waves reach a crescendo and peak on top of the slippery green slimy rocks of the Loon Islands and our canoe is deftly hoisted ashore using our wooden rollers we keep in our canoe for ballast.

Our hunting bags — which had all the necessary tools and grub to survive a longer stay out on the islands of the bay if necessary — are piled up onshore. The driver would mix his concoction of

oil and gasoline, and then pour it into a tank for the trip home. The trusty two-stroke engine wasn't as reliable as today's models, however. We checked our bags for sparkplugs and figured out a way to get the water out of the gas tank.

Meanwhile, the fire is going and the tea is made. We watch seals swim by on the leeward side and conjure up a path through the rocky shallows. Bannock and Klik and some Googum-made doughnuts provide a good meal. Beans were often a side dish and a lot of goofy jokes about flatulence made choking on your stale bannock a real danger. Having your tea handy for such occasions is a must.

We decide to do our hunting around the tips of the many reefs that pop out during low tide. This is serious stuff. You have to be completely still and well hidden for the many ducks and loons to fly by close enough to shoot

and bring down on land. Geese were a bonus. The guns blasting from our many spots on this skimpy outcrop in the huge waves made this a wet, yet prosperous, day.

Still, our guns resounded quietly, muffled in the strong winds and sounds of raging surf on foamed-up rocks made the retrieval of our kill a little tricky. Some ducks fell out of range on the quiet calm of the leeward side and we kept track of them to remember where to pick them up. Most of our kill lands back on shore, or if in the water, washed up and easy to recover.

Thinking of those islands, Loon and Seal, makes me wonder why they were called that in the first place. The Seal Islands is where we shot the red-throated loons and common loons and at the Loon Islands is where we found the seals. Go figure, but the islands off the mouth of the Chisasibi are far from unique as these small islands dot the coast of the eastern James Bay from Moosonee up.

Beans were often a side dish and a lot of goofy jokes about flatulence made **choking on your stale bannock** a real danger.

The teapot boils again for the second time on this duck-hunting trip and we head home with the setting sun at our backs. Brilliant oranges and purples fed by the strong winds helps time pass quickly as we watch the clouds, this time with the wind and waves at our backs. The tobacco comes out and cigarettes are rolled in the rough-hewn hands of an Elder who has lived like this since childbirth, some seven decades. The salt of the bays has crusted this old man's face and runs in our blood.

Under the Northern Sky

Where's the tea?

by Xavier Kataquapit



As a boy living in Attawapiskat, there were some things that were constant in my life. My mom Susan and dad Marius always made sure myself and my siblings had a roof over our head and food to eat. Back in the 1980s and early 1990s the community was impoverished and we did not have many of the normal services that most towns and cities enjoyed across Canada.

We were and still are a remote First Nation community and accessible only by air or by summer water barge. In the winter we have an ice road but depending on the weather it cannot be used for many months. Somehow we all coped with these realities and mostly because as children we did not know any other type of life first hand. The main ingredient that kept us together and functioning as a community had to do with the large number of traditional Elders living with us at that time. Every household had a large pot of tea steeping on the stove at all times of the day. You could always count on a cup of tea, a bite to eat and a chat with any of the Elders in Attawapiskat.

As children we were influenced by television and radio to a degree, but we still lived in a community that

was very much grounded in nature, the land, the water and the creatures around us. With so many problems such as drugs and alcohol it is amazing that most of us actually survived. The credit for a good part of our survival as teens had to do with the guidance and direction from our Elders. Most of them were still hurting from the experiences of residential school system and coping with drug and alcohol addictions. Still, they had a grounding in traditions that helped them go on with their lives and assist us younger ones with our paths.

Those Elders were part of the first generation of James Bay Cree to accept a more modern life with permanent moves into communities like Attawapiskat, Fort Albany, Moose Factory and Kashechewan. Their parents before them had mostly been living in the wilderness on their traditional lands. They still had a very traditional lifestyle, spoke the Cree language fluently, survived mostly on wild meat and fish, and although they began to follow many non-Native beliefs and realities they did so on their own terms that were rooted in their traditional culture.

My generation was the first wave of coastal Cree to venture out into the southern world. Many of us went to secondary school in southern cities. We obtained driver's licences and vehicles that enabled us to discover more of the outside world. A lot of us found work in southern towns and cities and although we still had a lot of our traditional knowledge and culture, time and distance meant more assimilation for us.

These days many of our Elders are passing on and I can see the affect that is having on our remote First Nations up the coast. Our young people are confused and don't have enough hope

for the future. All kinds of new drugs are finding their way up the coast and our vulnerable and rudderless youth are getting lost in a world that makes no sense. Still, many are also getting an education, finding work in new mining operations and other opportunities. Yet, there is still a large percentage of our youth that is fragile and living difficult lives. Even though things are better in some ways financially, there is still inadequate housing and little direction for the upcoming generation.

The current gap we are facing has to do with the passing of so many of our Elders who were more or less the glue we could count on that kept us connected to our traditions and culture. When I was home this summer for my mom's funeral I made sure to drop in on some of the still surviving Elders and I found many of them very weak and aged. It shocked me as I remembered these men and women as strong, vibrant Elders who took us out on the land, cared for us and showed us how to survive.

It was difficult for me to find myself wandering around the community without being able to see my mom, dad and many of the Elders I grew up with. Strangely enough that realization had a lot to do with the fact that I had a hard time to find any household still having a pot of tea on the stove. I began to crave a cup of tea more for the nostalgia and comfort that I had grown up with, but I realized that this had been a part of our Elders' world and there was no room for it in a new, more fast-paced lifestyle. I would have given anything and everything to be able to sit with my mom and dad over a cup of tea and some bannock and jam. I am making a point these days to keep a pot of tea steeping on the stove just in case.



The Best of the James Bay

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The Best of the James Bay Cree is back! Vote for the best (and worst) Cree men and women. We've got hunters, we've got trappers, and we've got people who fish. The smartest and most talented Cree, the biggest gossip, the best tallyman, outstanding youth and Elders will all be featured.

Please send your nominations by mail to the Nation marked Best of the James Bay, 4529 Clark Street, Suite #403, Montreal, QC, H2T 2T3. We will also be setting up an online survey that will be posted on our Facebook page. You have until November 14 to submit your votes.

All of our winners will be entered into a draw to win two free flights to Montreal with Air Creebec. Stay tuned for details and additional prizes!

1a. Best community contribution (male)

1b. Best community contribution (female)

2a. Most outstanding Elder (male)

2b. Most outstanding Elder (female)

3a. Most outstanding Youth (male)

3b. Most outstanding Youth (female)

4. Most outstanding Tallyman

5. Best hunter

6. Loudest hunter

7. Best fisherperson

8. Fastest goose plucker

9. Best storyteller (legends, hunting stories...)

10. Best bush camp

11. Best politician

12. Most disliked politician (Cree/non-Cree)

13. Best public speaker

14. Most likely to change the system

15. Most likely to lead us in the next generation

16. Best police officer

17. Best social worker

18. Best teacher

19a. Best athlete (male)

19b. Best athlete (female)

20a. Best cook (male)

20b. Best cook (female)

21a. Best artist (male)

21b. Best artist (female)

22. Best coach

23. Best fiddler

24a. Best musician (male)

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25. Best band/musical group

26. Best drumming group (Cree or non-Cree)

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28b. Best square dancer (female)

29. Biggest cultural contribution

30. Best powwow/summer games

31. Best traditional craftsperson

32. Best Cree media personality

33. Best Cree entity/corporation

34. Best Cree employer

35. Funniest Cree

36. Biggest gossip

37. Smartest Cree

38. Best nickname

39. Cree closest to sainthood

40. Best yard

41. Best logo (entities, corporations)

42. Coolest vehicle (car, boat, truck, etc...)

43. Nicest person

44. Nicest smile

45. Best pool player

46. Best checkers player

47. Best spot for UFO sighting

48. Most charitable Cree company/entity

49. Best band council

50. Worst band council

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5. Best hamburger

6. Best pizza

7. Best bar/club

8. Best grocery store

9. Rowdiest bar

10. Best hotel

11. Best hunting supplies

12. Best fishing supplies

13. Best sports supplies

14. Best bridal shop

15. Best flower shop

16. Best jewellery store

17. Best children's store

18. Best furniture shop

19. Best music shop

20. Coolest clothing store

21. Cheapest clothing store

22. Best gift shop

23. Best hair salon

24. Best hairdresser

25. Favourite airline

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29. Wildest tournament

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31. Favourite musical group

32. Best Cree business



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